

\Sermon 2008 Pentecost 12
Text: Matt. 14:13-21
Theme: "A Banquet in Our Midst"

We all know the story of the feeding of the 5,000. We grew up hearing about this miracle of feeding all those people with two fish and five loaves of bread and the interpretations of that miracle have been many. Some say that Jesus was teaching us that he is the provider of all and all we need to do is rely on him. Some say that he was teaching us that if we would all share what we have there would always be enough for everybody with plenty left over. Some say that he was using the meal to point forward to the Lord's Supper where through the simple elements of bread and wine he would provide us with his true body and blood which forgives our sins.

I think that all of the above is true. Jesus is the provider of everything we need. Jesus does expect us to share all we have been given because it's not ours in the first place and Jesus does use the simple elements of bread and wine through which to move his very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Now let's look at a new twist to this old story and see if we can't milk one more lesson from this miracle.

The crowds follow Jesus and are hungry because it's getting towards dinner time. The disciples give Jesus a simple enough order; "send them away." If you think about it, it's kind of funny the way we are always telling Jesus what to do. I hope he thinks it's funny too. I imagine he does. Dear Lord heal my disease. Dear Lord make me win the Powerball. Dear Lord find me a job. Listen to your own prayers and see how often you are good enough to give the Lord a little guidance in running the world. Anyway, the disciples were no different.

Look at what Jesus did. He turned it right back on them. He said, so give them something to eat and the disciples answered truthfully enough with what they had – namely 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus said, "give me what you have," and he gave thanks for it and began distributing it and lo and behold there was not only enough but more than enough. If they had hoarded what they had, no one would have eaten that night because they would have been hiding their food and the crowds had no food. But they gave thanks for what they had and then gave it away.

Now I think this is deeper than Jesus just telling us to share our sandwiches with one another. I see this principle at work in our lives with God's Grace. Someone is in need of forgiveness. Another is caught in some kind of wicked sin and doesn't even see it. Another is filled with anger and bitterness because things have not gone his way. People say to the Church, "Do something!" They say to the pastor, "Do something!" They say to God, "Why are you so lazy and mean? Do something to help your people!"

And God says to us, "I give you all grace in rich supply. USE IT!" God pours his grace out on the Church in his Word and Baptism and the Lord's Supper and we hoard it like a fat man hoards Twinkies (and I would know!). We act like it might kill us to give God's grace to another and I don't mean have a deep theological discussion where you evaluate the problems of the other and administer absolution. I mean treating your hurting brother or sister with a little love. I mean keeping your mouth shut if criticism and condemnation wants to come out and just giving a hug. I mean using the grace of God in your own life to learn how to be completely truthful and completely loving at the same time.

This impromptu banquet that Jesus threw on this hillside was nothing other than a reflection of the banquet in heaven that awaits us. Now it awaits us at the end of the age to be sure, but also know that we can belly up to it right now as well. Right now, today, we can ladle up a huge helping of love and forgiveness as we hear His Word, remember our Baptisms and receive the body and blood of Christ. And God's grace NEVER RUNS OUT. When everyone has had enough love and forgiveness there will still be basketsful left over.

There is only one way that God's grace will run out. That is if we horde it. If we horde it to ourselves, his grace will rot on our plates. If we keep it to ourselves long enough, one day we will look down at our grace plate and see nothing but a mess of rotting righteous indignation and some old dried up self righteousness. Like all of God's gifts; like our money, our time and our talents, the grace he gives us is meant to be given away and the miracle is that when we give it away, the well never runs dry. AMEN.